

THE BOOK OF THE SERPENT





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The BOOK *of*
the SERPENT

BY
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no 1

TO
EMILY PRENTISS TOLL

SCENE
THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

SPEAKING CHARACTERS

HE
THE SERPENT
THE TURTLE
THE GRASSHOPPER
THE BIRD
THE WOMAN
THE MAN
SOME FLAMINGOES

The BOOK *of*
the SERPENT

FIRST

Among the rocks there was a hollow where He had His working place.

The splintered rocks were as a wall between Him and the Seas, and the fierce Winds which roamed beyond came tame to Him.

The place was full of quietness and warm with the Sun's warmth.

The Turtle and the Grasshopper sang pleasantly. . . . And all the days were happiness—and all the nights were rest.

SECOND

He worked every day at something. It was fun to watch Him—everything was so interesting. The Turtle looked on and admired, and the Grasshopper rubbed his knees violently whenever he liked anything especially well.

He made the dust into little heaps first, and they kept asking questions.—“What’s this heap for,” and, “What’s that heap for?” One heap was quite a distance away from the others.—“What’s this heap for?” they asked. He was busy, but they had much curiosity and kept asking.—“Now, don’t bother me,” He said, “that’s Artists, I’m going to make Artists out of that.”

They were very interested and watched Him closely, but they could not see Him put anything different in it from what

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He had put in the other heaps. But they saw Him take some of the dust away and make little vacant places here and there. "That must be the way He is making them," said the Grasshopper,—“just by taking things out, that’s a jolly receipt.”

The Serpent was passing by and heard them talking, so he sat on his tail and watched them over the wall of rock—it looked so interesting that he came over.

“Oh!” he said, “that’s elimination,—it’s the easiest way to make things. First you make, and then you simplify,—it’s not so hard to be a Creator, and make things. You start them all alike, and then you take something out of one heap and put it in another and you take more things out of some heaps than you do out of others. Oh! it’s easy to be a Creator; why don’t you set up for yourselves?”

Just then He looked up and saw the Serpent. He said, “Run along, now, I don’t want to hear any of your Socialistic

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ideas.” And he chased him away.

The Serpent trailed off—right through the middle of the Artist heap.

“Oh! Oh!” said the Turtle, “now that’s spoiled, isn’t it too bad.” He didn’t say anything for a minute and then He looked amused. “Well! Well!” He said, “that’s just the thing, that signature is hard to forge.”

THIRD

He was in the hollow among the rocks again and He was working very hard this time on just one heap. He kept putting things in and He seemed especially interested. Every once in a while He sighed to Himself, and finally a great tear dropped into the centre of the heap.

They said, "When you made the Artist mud, you took things out, and now you put things in. Why do you do that? What are you going to make now?"

He said, "I'm going to make Mothers out of this heap."

"But," they said, "the Serpent told us it was the best way to take things out, and you are putting them in."

"Well," He said, "maybe the Serpent doesn't know the receipt for Mothers.— You needn't worry because I don't take

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things out—that will be done afterward
—and there won't be much of anything
left, except the tear I just dropped
in." . . .

FOURTH

He was in his working place among the rocks, but He was not working this time. He was just thinking. When he made Man He had thought, "Now I have something to be proud of, something which will be a credit to me." He had made monkeys and monkeys for studies when He had the Man idea, and finally He made Man. "Now," He said, "I have a friend and pretty soon I'll take him into partnership."

It was strange, but often after He had made things there seemed to be a lot in them that He had not put there and the more pains He took with them the less they seemed to belong to Him—it was hard to keep on making things when they acted this way. After a while He took courage. He said, "If I keep on try-

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ing, perhaps I'll get something good."

The Turtle and the Grasshopper were glad when they saw him look cheerful again,—the monkeys all looked cheerful, too. Somehow He took much comfort with the monkeys, although they were only studies. . . . They never talked back at Him and called Him out of His name as Man did.

He was still thinking about Man. The Turtle heard Him say "He seems to know more than I do. At the rate things are going, I may have to resign altogether."

"But you have us," said the Turtle, "why don't you take us and start another World where we won't have Man to interfere with us?"

"Yes, do, please do," said the Grasshopper.

He thought a while longer, and then He went to work. He sifted the dust three times to be sure that there was not

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anything wrong with it and then He sifted it all over again.

The Turtle and the Grasshopper were very much excited. "What? Oh! what are you making?" they said. "You were never so careful before."

"Well," He said, "I don't just know. —I'm using Man for a study and I don't exactly know, but something to beat Man, and I'm going to call it Woman. It is my intention that when I get it made it will keep him so busy that he won't have time to bother me." . . .

FIFTH

They were so interested and so sympathetic that He told them this time, before they asked, that He was making Financiers.

"Why do you make them?" said the Turtle.

"Yes, why?" said the Grasshopper.

He looked puzzled—"Well—there must be a reason," He said, "when it comes to that why—did I make you?"

"Oh!" they said, "that's funny, how could you make things at all if you didn't have some one to look on—that's why you made us, isn't it?"

"Well!" He said, "there's truth in that—one can work better with appreciation."

"Yes," they said, "it's pretty near the same as if we made the things ourselves."

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He didn't sift the dust this time. They remarked about that—they said, "That's the same way you made pigs."

"That's all right," He said. "The same essentials,—and don't talk so much, you disturb me. I've got to think hard to get the idea because, of course, there is an idea."

The Turtle retired into his house and thought, and thought. The Grasshopper sat away back in his knees and thought, and thought.

Finally He began to work again. He kept taking out handfuls of dust here and there and moulding them and putting them back again. He said they were Chances, because He did not feel quite sure that they would not turn out Pigs.

"Oh!" said the Turtle, "I can't get the idea,—I'm so tired trying."

"Nor I, either," said the Grasshopper.

"Well!" He said, "perhaps there isn't any Idea. We'll just let it go at Chances."

SIXTH

He was weary. The Turtle and the Grasshopper, too, were weary because He had not been working for a long time, and He was getting into the habit of not working, so the Turtle and the Grasshopper were very miserable. There was no more happiness. They kept begging Him to make some happiness, but He told them—He could not, “it was something that had to go and come and be free.”

“But,” they said, “we used to have a lot of it. Why did it come then?”

“We were so interested when you worked, and how we used to sing,” said the Grasshopper.

“I know,” said the Turtle, “it was working and singing at the same time, that made the happiness.”

They were so sympathetic with Him.

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They said, "Don't feel so bad about that last thing you made."

"But," He said, "it's such a puzzle."

"Yes," said the Grasshopper, "it's such a puzzle."

"It was that day after you made Woman and she kept changing her mind," said the Turtle.

"Yes," He said, "I thought I'd take her and Man for models and see what came of it."

"Yes, and when you had finished it, She said it was a genius, and you said it was a puzzle, and She said, "Of course it's a puzzle, stupid . . . all geniuses are puzzles."

SEVENTH

They were out on the rocks, on the edge of the World. There was a Tempest and He reached up and took a streak of lightning from the clouds, and played with it. The Woman saw Him, and she coaxed Him for it. She played with it a while, and then she grew afraid and gave it to the man. He also played with it and did curious and wonderful things.

The Serpent came wriggling over the wall of rocks. He looked at the lightning, and he said, "It's dangerous, it's electricity, it's life and perhaps it's death."

Man was just going to let it alone, but the Woman laughed a little rippling laugh and said, "Are you afraid?" So he kept on fooling with it, and then something happened, and there wasn't any-

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thing but the Turtle, and the Grasshopper, and rocks, and Sea and Sky, and a Great Wind that shook and trembled. They were afraid. They crept close to Him in a corner of the rocks, and He put his hand over them while the Wind went by and comforted them, so they were not afraid. . . .

EIGHTH

It was the next morning,—the mornings were long then. The Sun shone warm upon the rocks and the Grasshopper and the Turtle were happy,—they were alone with Him.

There was a happy silence—just the splash of ripples against the rocks, and little clouds were flying by. . . . He reached, and took one in His hand and shaped it into a Bird and let it fly again. He said to the Bird, “Go, search above the rocks for Woman, for now I am refreshed and I will work again.” And when the Bird was gone, they rested on the rocks and they were happy, for all was peace.

He ran his fingers caressingly along the streaks of sunshine on the rocks and where He touched the sunshine, flowers sprang up.

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He said, "These things are beautiful."
They said, "We did not see you make them."

"Oh! No!" He said, "I did not make them—they sprang from happiness—I love them"—and then a Fragrance came from them in answer to his love.

NINTH

It was evening and the Bird returned and said, "I have found Woman,—she is alive upon the rocks, and she has Man with her. He was afloat upon the waters and she has brought him up upon the rocks and he is dead."

They went to find her, and the Bird flew on before to show the way, and when they found them, she had covered his body with her long thick hair to make him warm.

She held him close, and called to him, and finally she kissed him on the mouth.

She kissed him long and tenderly, and he drew in her breath and lived.

And He said, "She has given him life, She has forgotten self—and She shall be the Mother of a Race."

TENTH

The Sun shone hot upon the rocks and the Turtle said to Him, "You made my house so I could sit inside and be cool. Do you remember? At first I could run in and out at will, and then when you made monkeys they were so mischievous, that they ran off with my house and hid it, whenever I left it out of sight, and so you fastened it to me. I wish you could make something to keep it cool, it gets so hot sometimes."

"And me, too," said the Grasshopper, "I, too, wish to keep cool when the sun is hot."

He said, "To-morrow it shall be as you desire."

The next day there were cool green rushes and other green things growing among the rocks. They were so pleased,

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the Turtle sang his song and the Grasshopper jumped for joy.

"What is its name?" the Turtle asked.

"Please name it for me," said the Grasshopper. "I feel as if I'd always had it."

"What did you make it of," the Turtle asked.

"The same as you, of dust," He said.

The Serpent, who was half asleep, murmured, "All flesh is grass."

ELEVENTH

It was warm on the rocks and the Serpent was asleep. The Turtle and the Grasshopper were happy because He was working. He was making some experiments, and all was peaceful and pleasant. The Serpent opened his eyes and stretched himself and yawned. He said, "I could tell you a story about a Garden, a Tree and an Apple—and Woman and me.—Oh! Yes! and Man, too,—only he doesn't count for much in it."

"What's a Tree?" asked the Grasshopper.

"Something that's going to be," said the Serpent.

"What's an apple?" asked the Turtle.

"The Fruit of the Tree," said the Serpent.

"Oh! but you said you could tell us a

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story; how can you, when these things haven't been?"

"Ah! ha!" said the Serpent, "it would be easy enough to tell you a story about things that have been, but it takes me and my wisdom to tell you of things that will be and make up stories about them."

"But isn't it true? Or won't it be true? You've got us so mixed up with your has beens and your will be's."

"Well," said the Serpent, "it depends on what you call true. Does believing a thing make it true? Does doubting it make it false?"

"Oh! dear! Oh! dear!" said the Turtle, "what things you do say. I can't think except when I'm in my house and when I come out I forget what I've thought about."

"It's all so difficult," said the Grasshopper.

The Serpent looked very wise: "Perhaps it is true pragmatically."

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"Why don't you go on and tell us?" they said.

"I didn't say I would, I said I could."

He looked up from his work and He said, "Suggestions are dangerous things; now that idea will keep on growing through the centuries. What a mischief-maker you are."

TWELFTH

The Serpent was telling them a story. A sort of out loud meditation was the way that he told stories to the Turtle and the Grasshopper—he did not seem to always remember that they were present. It was as if their being there was an excuse for talking to himself.

The three were down on a shelf of rocks, quite by themselves. The Serpent had on his far-seeing look, his eyes glittered with the intensity of his gaze into the future. Very often he did not begin his stories,—he started in the middle and worked both ways.

He said, “Now you wouldn’t suppose, would you, that one would leave freedom for slavery?”

“What’s slavery?” asked the Turtle.

“You are free and your house is a

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slave. You go where you please and your house goes where you will."

"But I can't get rid of my house."

"No," said the Grasshopper, "you are the slave of your house."

"H'm!" said the Serpent, "out of the mouths of Turtles and Grasshoppers comes wisdom."

"Sometime, away in the future, so far that you need not try to imagine, there will be great numbers of things similar to this Man and this Woman, but there will never be two exactly the same."

"How wonderful that will be," said the Grasshopper.

"They will do many wonderful things and they will become the slaves of the things they do—they will have great wisdom for the moment and much foolishness for the everlasting—and that which for many ages they will value most shall be valueless and for long time, their torment; they will forget to count the cost except in Gold."

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"What's that?" said the Grasshopper.

"What's what?" said the Serpent, coming back from the future.

"What you just said, Gold, gold," said the Turtle.

"How you disturb my train of thought. Gold is the value which shall be valueless."

"But we don't understand; don't talk so over our heads.—Where is it?"

"There isn't any," said the Serpent.

"Oh! dear! Oh! dear!" said the Grasshopper. "What do you mean?"

The voice of the Serpent sounded afar off . . . "It is the ardour in the veins of the Earth for the Sun—that which will be gold . . . and the same for the Moon will be Silver. And Diamonds will be the moments of ecstasy where the rays of the Sun pierce deep into the Bosom of the Earth" . . . and the Serpent shut his eyes and basked in the heat of the Sun.

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There was a silence for a little while.

“Will there be any us?” asked the Grasshopper and the Turtle.

“Many, many different kinds of you,” said the Serpent, “and never any two the same.”

“Oh! Oh!! But won’t He have to work a lot,” said the Grasshopper.

The Serpent stood up on his tail and made himself into a hoop—he said to them, “Give me a little push to start me”—and he rolled off out of sight among the rocks. . . .

They wondered what he meant by it and if it was the answer to their question.

THIRTEENTH

The Turtle and the Grasshopper were talking it over together the next day.

The Turtle said, "Did you notice? The Serpent went on and around at the same time—of course, it was the answer to our question."

They sat down in the Sun together and waited for the Serpent.—They saw him coming slowly a long way off—so they went to meet him. They said, "You know that story you told us yesterday?"

"Yes," he said. "That will be one of the sermons of the stones."

"I thought you said it was a story—what is a sermon?"

"A narcotic," said the Serpent.

"Oh, now he's giving us another puzzle," said the Grasshopper. "We want

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to know the name for going around and on at the same time."

"Evolution," said the Serpent.

"I like that name," said the Turtle.

"Yes, it makes us feel like going on, too," said the Grasshopper. "I say, won't you please make yourself into a hoop again and let us push you? You looked so interesting rolling off."

"Not now," said the Serpent. "It wasn't quite easy for me to stop myself, I'm not feeling very well to-day."

FOURTEENTH

“Why are you sad?” the Turtle said, “I saw tears dropping from your eyes.”

“Because I am remembering when mortal ears will cease to hear the singing of the stars and when the moon no longer can inspire a Poet. When Poetry goes, Music and Art must follow on to other worlds.”

“And what is Poetry?” the Turtle asked.

“It’s what I’m saying to you now,—it is the Breath of Beauty and it belongs to primal things.”

“It’s very sad,” said the Grasshopper, wiping his eyes on his knees—and the Turtle sat away back in his house and grieved. “It’s so sad for you to have to know the things which will be,” said the Grasshopper.

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"Yes, it's a punishment for something I am going to do."

"I should think the punishment would come afterwards," the Turtle said, putting his head out of his house.

"No, it's better to have it first, so you can do the sin with a clear conscience."

"But must you do it?"

"It would be silly not to, wouldn't it, after I've suffered the punishment?"

"We can't understand," said the Grasshopper.

"Perhaps it's better that we can't," said the Turtle, retiring into his house.

The Serpent writhed himself slowly away over the rocks. But the Grasshopper was not satisfied and called after him.

"Will you please tell us what is Art?"

"I can't stop to tell you now," said the Serpent, "it's too long and besides if it were possible to explain it would be no longer Art."

"Oh! but please tell us a little," begged

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the Turtle and the Grasshopper together.

“Why did He do the Artist dust first?”

“Because it will take so long for it to ripen.”

“Couldn’t He have made the Man out of the Artist dust?” asked the Turtle.

“It would not have been wise—it would not be easy to make a Man out of the Artist dust.”

“Well, then, why didn’t He wait and make the Artists out of the Man dust?” asked the Grasshopper.

“You wouldn’t understand if I told you,” said the Serpent. “It wouldn’t do to make Artists out of ordinary Man dust, they have not much in common.”

FIFTEENTH

There had been rain for many days.

"You are looking so unhappy, please tell us what you are thinking about," said the Turtle.

"You wouldn't understand," said the Serpent.

"Oh! try us," said the Grasshopper, "sometimes it's much more interesting when you can't understand."

"Yes," said the Turtle, "there seems to be so much more in it than there is, one can imagine all sorts of stories about the things that might be, and are not."

"That's along the line of Logic," said the Serpent.

"Logic! what's that?" said the Turtle.

"Oh!" said the Serpent, rubbing his head gently with the tip of his tail, "it's just another name for untruth—some-

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thing that is only true in that it's always false."

"Oh! dear!" said the Grasshopper, "it's another of his ensembles. You shouldn't have bothered him, you ought to have let him alone."

"It is false because it never takes the unknown quantity into consideration. It does not acknowledge the unknown quantity and that is the only thing of which one can be sure."

"Oh! what is it? What is it?" said the Turtle and the Grasshopper together.

"It is unknown," said the Serpent.

"H'm!" they said, "isn't it interesting? Now we'll go and imagine things until the Sun comes out."

SIXTEENTH

The Man and the Woman were together on the rocks—far out on the rocks . . . on the edge of the world, and they dared to look over . . . They wondered,—they wondered deeply, of endings and beginnings.

The Serpent came behind them and he said, "Do not look over,—it causes dizziness, the things which you might see would cause it and you may lose your balance."

"But," the Woman said, "I have great curiosity to know about Beginnings and the End."

"Yes," said the Man. "I too. What is the end?"

The Serpent said, "Observe"—and when they looked, he took his tail into his mouth and made himself a circle.

SEVENTEENTH

It was the next day and the Man and the Woman were again upon the rocks.

The Woman said, "I have decided, I will look."

They crept away down on the rocks until they could go down no further.

Man held her by the ankle and she reached over and looked far down, and when he helped her up she trembled and she could not tell him what she saw. There was a great dread upon her for she had seen that which she could not tell and she possessed a secret knowledge.

The Serpent came behind them, and he said, "You have seen that which has given you intuition and you never will know perfect happiness again." The Serpent said to Man, "Will you look too? The Woman has another sense."

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But Man refused to look—and then there came between them and the deep unknown a veil—so none could ever look again.

EIGHTEENTH

He rested on the rocks and Woman sat beside Him. She looked far off across the waters and she sighed. And when she turned she saw Man coming toward her on the rocks, and hanging from his hand was the dead Bird, the same that found them that time of the great Tempest. Man had killed it.

The Woman asked him why he had killed the Bird. He answered, "Because it flew so high. I called it and it came into my hand, so then I killed it."

The Woman took the Bird from him and warmed it in her bosom. She wrapt it 'round with her long hair and sang in a low voice a song that had the movement of a wave. There came a look of longing in her eyes and when He saw the look, He touched the Bird so that it

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fluttered against her heart and lived.

So then He said, "This thing shall make your happiness,—all through the ages you shall sing the cradle song and while you sing the wings of love shall cover you."

NINETEENTH

The Woman sat alone upon the rocks. She felt the flutter of the dove against her heart and still she sang the cradle song. Man called to her to walk with him among the dangerous places along the edges, but she would not go.

He said to Man, "She will not go with you again along the brink of chasms in the dangerous places, but she will wait for you and comfort you when you return."

Day after day she rested in the sunny places on the rocks. There came the look of Future in her eyes, and when the night closed down she sang the cradle song to the dove that nestled to her heart.

The Turtle and the Grasshopper played near her feet. He came and talked with her and Man was wandering far among the chasms.

TWENTIETH

High on a ledge of rock the Serpent coiled and basked and chanted to the Sun.

“Oh! Thou giver of Life—Oh! Thou Sun, Creator of Love, of Love.

“Oh! Thou Sun, Giver of all, Giver of Life, of Love—Giver of warmth, Giver of rest,—Oh! Thou Sun!”

The Turtle and the Grasshopper listened and understood, for they, too, loved the Sun.

TWENTY-FIRST

“But,” said the Turtle, “how can we forget things, if we do not know them?”

This was because the Serpent was so affected about something which he was seeing in the Future—and he was saying that the only way he could be happy was to forget.

“Then,” said the Grasshopper, “the only way to be happy is to know things and forget them?”

“Why!” said the Turtle, “that would be the same as if you never knew them. It’s awfully hard to understand . . . I’m going back in my house and think about it.”

“What ‘is it makes us want to know things when it makes us unhappy to know them, and we have to forget them to be happy again? The harder I try to forget

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things the more I can't," said the Grasshopper.

"It is curiosity," said the Serpent.

"Then it must be curiosity that makes all the trouble," said the Turtle, putting his head out of his house.—"But how?"

"Yes, why?" said the Grasshopper.

TWENTY-SECOND

The Turtle and the Grasshopper wondered continually about what would happen next and how things would end.

The Serpent said, "I have told you many times that there is no end and neither are there beginnings, because things evolve from other things."

"Oh! Oh!" said the Turtle and the Grasshopper together, "this is too much. You cannot make us believe that there are no beginnings,—because, how would things ever get started?"

The Serpent said, "We shall keep on going around and around and around faster and faster and smoother and smoother until all the edges become worn away.—We shall whirl and whirl faster and faster until the Sun whirls us into his centre and absorbs us into himself, and we

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shall keep on whirling with him forever and ever and ever—World without end.” And the Serpent stood on his tail and whirled in the light of the Sun.

“Oh!” said the Turtle, “how dizzy I am.”

“Me, too,” said the Grasshopper, “I, too, am dizzy. What is dizziness?”

“It is an affliction of weak minds,” said the Serpent.

TWENTY-THIRD

He shaped Flamingoes from the roseate clouds of dawn, and sent them flying far. When they returned at setting of the Sun, the sky was red with them.

He sent by them the grains of dust which held the germs of life, to distant places. They were the germs of vegetation which the Sun warmed into life.

And when Man went among the chasms searching as was his wont, he found a place where soft grass grew, and all the place was soothing to the feet and pleasant to the eye. In parts the grass grew tall and large and spread out mighty at the top,—and the Flamingoes rested in the Branches of the grass. Man said to them, “What place is this?” They said, “It is a dwelling place.”

TWENTY-FOURTH

The Serpent coiled where the Sun shone hottest on the rocks. He lifted up his head toward the Sun and saw the Woman lying her full length sleeping in the light. He gazed a long time with his diamond eyes until she came awake.

She said, "I have been dreaming. I dreamed I was a creature of the Sun." She closed her eyes again and sighed.

The Serpent said, "Do you remember?" Again he said, "Do you remember?"

"No—No," she said, "except the dream, —and yet, and yet, sometimes when you are chanting to the Sun your chants of love there's something draws me, I almost can remember, only 'tis far away . . . What is it? I was not what I am . . . What was it? 'Tis something about the

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Sun and you—no, no, I would not know, it makes me shiver as when I looked into the chasms.”

The Serpent said, “What is it when you hear me chanting to the Sun, what is it makes you shiver? Is it because the Earth is cold? Come, chant your worship to the Sun with me.”

The Woman said, “Do you remember that time I looked into the chasms how strong Man held me by the ankle? He is not here, but that I can remember how strong he held me.”

“No,” she said, “I will not chant the Sun with you lest I remember all—But I will sing my cradle song and wait for Man.”

TWENTY-FIFTH

And Man returned to where the Woman waited on the rocks. She saw him coming and she went to meet him, and when she came to him it made him glad.

She said, "I have a gift for you"—and then she placed the dove which she had held so long against her heart within his arms.

Man said, "It is like you."

"Oh, no!" she said, "it is like you."

He said, "It is like both of you."

And Man gave Woman back the dove and made a circle of his arm around them.

"The dove is ours," he said. "Come, let us go, for I have found a dwelling place."

TWENTY-SIXTH

“You said one day ‘Nothing is lost.’ Do you remember all the Artist dust and all the Mother dust and many, many other sorts of dust that He prepared, and how in the great Tempest it was blown away? What was the use of making it, for it is lost?”

“Yes,” said the Turtle, “please explain, for surely it is lost.”

The Serpent smiled. He said: “Oh ye of the short sight—logicians of your time, the Wind of the great Tempest was but a servant of the Future. All things are servants of the Future.”

“But how?—Explain,” the Turtle said.

“The dust was whirled and blown to every portion of this star.”

“You said it was the Earth.”

“It is a Star—and when the time is ripe—the Sun will give it life.”

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"The Sun?" they asked. "Wherefore the Sun? Why do you chant the Sun?"

"And what else should I chant?" the Serpent said. "I chant the centre, without it nothing—nothing before and nothing after."

TWENTY-SEVENTH

The Turtle and the Grasshopper were talking together on the rocks. They saw the Serpent coming.

Now said the Grasshopper, "You ask him first."

So when the Serpent had come near, the Turtle said, "You told us that the Sun is all, nothing before and nothing after—then—what is He?"

"Many will ask that question," said the Serpent, "and the answers will be as many."

"Tell us—tell us—why did He want Woman back that time of the great Tempest?"

"Why not have made another?"

The Serpent smiled—"She is His Masterpiece—one never makes another."

"And will there be no other Woman?"

BOOK OF THE SERPENT 53

"There will be Women," said the Serpent.

"Why do you speak in riddles? You are so hard to understand,"—the Grasshopper chirped happily, "And what are you?"

The Serpent slowly writhed himself away and as he went there was a sound of laughing which echoed from the rocks. . . .

When it had ceased they said, "Come, let us go and watch Him at His work. He will be lonely now His Masterpiece has gone. . . . Let us forget the things the Serpent told us . . . lest we become as wise as he."

"'Tis true," the Turtle said, "if we keep on remembering we may become as wise as he and suffer the punishment for things that we may do. Let us forget for fear the memory of the Future may come to us."

"Yes," said the Grasshopper, "it will be happier so . . . let us forget."

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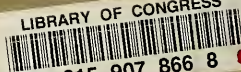
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